

## Peer Review Plan for the Five Utah Cactus Quantitative Recovery Criteria Scientific Report

### Estimated Timeline of the Peer Review:

- **Draft document to be sent to peer reviewers:** August, 2021
- **Peer review initiated:** August, 2021
- **Peer review to be completed by:** September, 2021
- **Determination regarding species' status expected:** This report will help support recovery planning for the following five Utah cactus species that are listed under the Endangered Species Act: San Rafael cactus (*Pediocactus despainii*; endangered), Winkler cactus (*Pediocactus winkleri*; threatened), Pariette cactus (*Sclerocactus brevispinus*; threatened), Uinta Basin hookless cactus (*Sclerocactus wetlandicus*; threatened), and Wright fishhook cactus (*Sclerocactus wrightiae*; endangered).

### About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994 peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004 Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, and our August 22, 2016 memorandum clarifying the peer review process, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will solicit independent scientific review of the information contained in this scientific report. The Service will nominate potential peer reviewers.

We will consider the following criteria for any potential nomination:

- **Expertise:** The reviewer should have knowledge of any one or all of the 5 Utah cactus species, or of a similar species, or of their habitat in Utah.
- **Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the Service. In rare cases, a Service employee may be a valuable expert and may be used as a peer reviewer, provided that the employee is independent of ongoing activities related to delisting the species. If a Service employee is selected, we will still solicit peer review from at least three other experts. Academic, consulting, or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, we will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these nominations) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to these five Utah cactus species. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers. We will solicit reviews from at least three qualified experts.

We will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role, instructions for fulfilling that role, and the draft scientific report. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the scientific report is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the final scientific report.

Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on identifying and characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts.

Specific questions the reviewers will be asked include the following:

1. Are the methods and analysis used to develop population models and evaluate the effects of stressors to populations appropriate and adequate?
2. Are there any significant oversights, omissions, or inconsistencies in the methods and analyses?
3. Are the conclusions logical and supported by the evidence and analyses?

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Service, by way of email to the independent peer review coordinator. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews and Conflict of Interest declarations, including their names and affiliations, will (1) be included in the administrative record for the scientific report, and (2) be available to the public once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers before releasing the final scientific report.

### **About Public Participation**

The peer review process will be initiated shortly. We strongly encourage that public comments on the approach of this peer review be submitted by early August 2021, in order to allow enough time for processing and consideration. However, we will accept comments on the peer review plan throughout the process. The scientific report will help inform recovery planning for the following five cactus species found in Utah: San Rafael cactus (*Pediocactus despainii*), Winkler cactus (*Pediocactus winkleri*), Partridge cactus (*Sclerocactus brevispinus*), Uinta Basin hookless cactus (*Sclerocactus wetlandicus*), and Wright fishhook cactus (*Sclerocactus wrightiae*).

### **Contact**

For more information, contact Craig Hansen at [craig\\_hansen@fws.gov](mailto:craig_hansen@fws.gov) (303-236-4647).